The Muslim WORLD

Al-Ghazālī's Use of "Original Human Disposition" (*Fiṭra*) and Its Background in the Teachings of al-Fārābī and Avicenna

Frank Griffel*
Yale University

In an often read and frequently cited passage on the early pages of his autobiography *The Deliverer from Error* (*al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl*), al-Ghazālī quotes a well-known prophetical *ḥadīth* that says all children are born with a certain *fiṭra* while it is their parents who turn them into Jews, Christians, or Zoroastrians. The passage gives a lively account of al-Ghazālī's early intellectual development during his childhood or teenage years and is aimed to explain to the reader what prompted him to abandon an attitude of "uncritical emulation" (*taqlīd*) that limits most people's intellectual development. The notion of *fiṭra*, a term that can be tentatively translated as "original disposition," plays an important role in this personal development. The passage paints a vivid picture of what set al-Ghazālī on his lifelong intellectual quest for certainty and merits to be quoted in full. Talking about the days of his youth before he was twenty, al-Ghazālī says:

> A thirst for understanding how things truly are was from the very beginning and from the prime of my life my habit and my practice. It is an inborn capacity (*gharīza*) and a talent (*fiṭra*) from God that had been put into my nature (*jibilla*) not by way of choice (*ikhtiyār*) or as a means that accomplishes an end (*ḥīla*). This went so far that already at the young age of a boy the shackles of uncritical emulation (*taqlīd*) fell off me, and the convictions that I had inherited fell apart. This came because I saw the boys of the Christians always growing up embracing Christianity, and the boys of the Jews always following Judaism, and the boys of the Muslims always growing up adhering to Islam. I heard the *ḥadīth* that is reported from the Prophet, peace be upon him, where he says: "Every newborn is born according to the original disposition (*ʿalā l-fiṭra*), and his parents turn him into a Jew, a Christian, or a Zoroastrian (*majūs*)."[1] Thereupon, my innermost

* While working on this article I benefited from conversations with Sophia Vasalou, University of Cambridge, who first realized the importance of some of the sources it discusses.

[1] The *ḥadīth* is considered sound and appears, for instance, in quite similar wording within al-Bukhārī's collection (*qadar*, 3). See the translation of the full *ḥadīth* in Livnat Holtzman, "Human Choice, Divine

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> prompted me to seek the true meaning of the initial *fiṭra* and the true meaning of the convictions that come about by emulating parents and teachers.[2]

Al-Ghazālī uses the Arabic word *fiṭra* twice in this passage and each time it has a slightly different meaning. The first time it describes al-Ghazālī's distinct talent to ask critical questions and pursue them until he found an answer. Here, al-Ghazālī shows no humility and it is clear that his talent for rational inquiry is way above the average ability in this field. Secondly, al-Ghazālī refers to the "initial original disposition" (*al-fiṭra al-aṣliyya*) that all humans have in common. This latter understanding of a natural human disposition is given great importance in this passage. Al-Ghazālī almost reduces his lifelong intellectual quest to a proper understanding of what this original disposition truly contains and where it leads to.

Fiṭra plays an important role in al-Ghazālī's thinking and yet the subject has attracted only scant attention.[3] This is not only true for al-Ghazālī but for Islamic intellectual history as a whole. Following al-Ghazālī, the notion takes a quite central position in Islamic theology and it becomes even more important for authors such as Fakhr al-Din al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), Ibn ʿArabī (d. 638/1240), and Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), for instance. This important development cannot be dealt within a single article. In fact, the wealth of material about *fiṭra* in these and other authors merits monographic studies on this subject. This article aims to break some ground about *fiṭra* in Islamic thought by showing what al-Ghazālī meant by this term and where the sources of his thinking lie. As with much of al-Ghazālī's thought, it has been heavily influenced by the teachings of the *falāsifa*, most importantly Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā, d. 428/1037). This article will therefore begin by discussing the meaning of the word *fiṭra* in al-Ghazālī and then focus in its main part on how the term was used by al-Fārābī (d. 339/950–51) as well as Avicenna.

The Arabic word *fiṭra* carries such a range of meanings that it cannot be easily translated into English. Al-Fayrūzābādī (d. 817/1415) in his dictionary of the Arabic language defines it as: "the natural constitution (*al-khilqa*) with which a child is created

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Guidance and the *Fiṭra* Tradition: The Use of Hadith in Theological Treasises by Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya," in *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*, ed. Y. Rapoport and S. Ahmed (Karatchi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 163–188, 166.

[2] al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl / Erreur et délivrance*, ed. and French transl. F. Jabre, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Commission libanaise pour la traduction des chefs-d'œuvre, 1969), 10.21–11.6. For an English translation see e.g. *Al-Ghazali: Deliverance from Error. Five Key Texts Including His Spriritual Autobiography, al-Munqidh min al-Dalal*, transl. R.J. McCarthy (Louisville (Ky.): Fons Vitae: 2000), 54–55. The centrality of this passage for the academic and even the popular understanding of al-Ghazālī may be illustrated by the fact that Ovidio Salazar's 2006 movie *Al-Ghazali: The Alchemist of Happiness* begins with this quote and includes a discussion of the meaning of *fiṭra* for al-Ghazālī.

[3] On *fiṭra* in al-Ghazālī see Farid Jabre, *Essai sur le lexique de Ghazali* (Beirut: Librairie Orientale, 1985), 222–224, Hermann Landolt, "Ghazālī and 'Religionswissenschaft' Some Notes on the Mishkāt al-Anwār," *Asiatische Studien. Zeitschrift der Schweizer Gesellschaft für Asienkunde* (Bern) 45 (1991): 19–72, esp. 19–21, and the handful of contributions referenced in Hans Daiber, *Bibliography of Islamic Philosophy*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 2:148.

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in his mother's womb and the religion (*al-dīn*)."[4] This description of the meaning of *fiṭra* relies heavily on its usage in the Qur'an and in the *ḥadīth* corpus. Outside of these religious sources, the term doesn't seem to have been used in early Arabic literature.[5] The verb *faṭara* appears on seven occasions in the Qur'an in the meaning of "to create."[6] On five other occasions, the active participle of that verb describes God as "the Creator of the heavens and the earth (*fāṭir al-samawāt wa-l-arḍ*).[7] The key passage in the Qur'an is, however, in verse 30 in *sūrat al-Rūm* (30). The verse, whose syntax isn't entirely clear, assumes that there is a certain constitution "according to which God created humans," and that being a *ḥanīf* is an expression of that constitution.[8] According to Theodor Nöldecke und Friedrich Schwally *fiṭra* is a loanword from Ethiopian and means "a certain way of creation or of being created."[9] A *ḥanīf* is someone who lived before the advent of Islam according to rules and convictions that are similar to it. Abraham is the model of a *ḥanīf* in the Qur'an. Verses 6:75–79 in the Qur'an tell that he grew up among polytheists but understood that there is only one God and became a monotheist all by himself. At one point, the Qur'an calls Abraham a *ḥanīfan musliman* (3.65–), a *ḥanīf* who submitted himself to God, or a Muslim *ḥanīf*, somewhat suggesting that as a *ḥanīf*, Abraham was a Muslim *avant la lettre*.

This Qur'anic verse together with the above quoted and well-known *ḥadīth* led to widespread notions within the Muslim community that, unless there is a cause for deviation, their *fiṭra* will lead humans to become Muslims. The idea that all humans have a natural tendency to become Muslims is widespread in Islam. An example is a tombstone from 277/891 that was found in Egypt and says the buried person died, "in accord with the *fiṭra* of Islam and the religion of Muḥammad."[10]

It is therefore not surprising that the existing secondary literature on *fiṭra* — which is not very extensive — tends to assume that Muslim authors equated the notion of a original human disposition with Islam. This view certainly has a sound basis in Islamic

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[4] al-Fayrūzābādī, *al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1419/1998), 457. Cf. the English translation by Edward William Lane in his *Arabic-English Lexicon, derived from the Best and most Copious Sources*, 8 vols. (London/Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1863–85), 6:2416.

[5] For an analysis of the early use of *fiṭra* in Arabic see Geneviève Gobillot, *La Fiṭra: la conception originelle, ses interpretations et functions chez les penseurs musulmans* (Damascus: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 2000), 7–18.

[6] Qur'an, 6.79, 11.51, 17.51, 20.72, 36.22, 43.27, 21.56

[7] Qur'an, 6.14, 2.101, 14.10, 35.1, 42.11.

[8] Qur'an, 30:30: *fa-qim wajhaka li-l-dīni ḥanīfan fiṭrata Llāhi allatī faṭara l-nāsʿalaybi*; "So set thy face toward the religion just like a *ḥanīf* does. God's original disposition (*fiṭrat Allāh*), according to which He created humans."

[9] "[E]ine Art und Weise des Erschaffens oder des Erschaffenseins," see Theodor Nöldecke, *Neue Beiträge zur semitischen Sprachwissenschaft* (Strassburg: Trüber, 1910), 49, and Friedrich Schwally, "Lexikalische Studien," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 53 (1899): 197–201, 199–200.

[10] *ʿalā fiṭrat al-Islām wa-dīn Muḥammad*; M. Cohen, Ét. Combe, K. A. C. Creswell *et alii*, *Répertoire chronologique d'épigraphie arabe* (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1931–), 2:245, no. 752.

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texts. Several studies discuss the implications of that identification for the legal status of children and unbelievers as well as their fate in the afterlife.[11] The position that Islam is the inborn religion of humanity bears, however, several theological problems. One problem would be the need to reconcile the emergence of Islam as a religion that comes relatively late in human history with the notion that the *fiṭra* is "original." To which religion did the *fiṭra* turn humans before the advent of Islam? While that problem could and has been solved through such notions as Adam's original covenant with God (described in verse 7:172 of the Qur'an) or the existence of *ḥanīfs* before Islam,[12] a second difficulty weights heavier: Why would humanity be in need of divine revelation in the form of the Qur'an if all that Islam teaches is already contained in the original human disposition? The position that the *fiṭra* is or includes Islam plays into the hand of a Muʿtazilite concept of the relationship between human nature and revelation where revelation simply confirms or repeats what is already known to humans through their *fiṭra*. Assuming some kind of identity or implication of Islam with the *fiṭra* leads to the admission that divine revelation is superfluous for those who have a sound original disposition. That was clearly unacceptable for Sunni authors such as al-Ghazālī, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, and Ibn Taymiyya. Their relationship between *fiṭra* and Islam is more complex than a simple identity or a relationship of implication.[13]

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[11] Camilla Adang gives a very good introduction to this literature in her "Islam as the Inborn Religion of Mankind: The Concept of *Fiṭrah* in the Works of Ibn Hazm," *al-Qanṭara* 21 (2000): 391–410. She also presents the views of D. B. Macdonald, A. J. Wensinck, J. van Ess and others in the existing secondary literature. Recently Livnat Holtzman argued (in "Human Choice, Divine Guidance and the *Fiṭra* Tradition") that Ibn Taymiyya and his student Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350) assume "an equation of *fiṭra* with Islam" (179) and hold the position that "[a]ll humans are born as Muslims" (174). In my earlier article "The Harmony of Natural Law and Shariʾa in Islamist Theology," in *Shariʾa: Islamic Law in the Contemporary Context*, ed. F. Griffel and A. Amanat (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 38–61, 196–203, esp. 45–46, I suggested that for Ibn Taymiyya, Islam and its *sharīʿa* are not identical with the human *fiṭra* nor are they a part of it. Rather, the humans' *fiṭra* leads them to become Muslims because Islam and its *sharīʿa* respond most perfectly to what the *fiṭra* requires all humans to adopt in terms of religion and legislation. With their *fiṭra* intact and unobstructed, humans will choose milk over wine and Islam over any other religion because they realize that milk and Islam respond better to their needs than the alternatives.

[12] Cf. the *ḥadīth qudsī* where God is quoted as saying: "I have created all my human creatures (*ʿibādī*) as *ḥanīfs*, and the satans lead them away from their religion." (Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, *janna* 16.)

[13] A third theological problem would be the conflict between human free will and divine predestination that the suggestion of Islam as the original religion of every human brings up. Proponents of human free will would object that humans choose their religions individually. This paper, however, is mostly interested in theological debates among Sunni authors, who usually have few problems with accepting a predestined original religion of all humans. On these kinds of theological debates see the discussions by Gobillot, *La Fiṭra: la conception originelle*, 46–70, and Holtzman, "Human Choice, Divine Guidance and the *Fiṭra* Tradition." As a background to Holtzman's article, it should be kept in mind that in his theology Ibn Taymiyya distinguished rigorously between two kinds of approaches to predestination, the *tawḥīd al-rubūbiyya* that asserts God's omnipotence and predestination, and the *tawḥīd al-ulūhiyya* that regards the human as a respondent to God's commands who chooses between

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In the following I shall try and make a contribution to the role of *fiṭra* in theological debates about *epistemology* in Islam. Debates about the epistemological dimension of *fiṭra* try to answer the question: What knowledge does the original dispositions of humans include? This question does not — as far as I can see — seem to have been much discussed in early Islam. A mayor thinker about *fiṭra* such as Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064) of Cordoba, for instance, was not interested in it.[14] The position that all humans have a certain body of knowledge in common or at least have all access to a common body of knowledge regardless of their upbringing, education, intellectual environment, or acquaintance with divine revelations is one that generates in philosophical literature and is carried into Muslim theological debates by al-Ghazālī.

1. *Fiṭra* in al-Ghazālī

There is not one passage in al-Ghazālī where he clearly spells out what he means by *fiṭra*. If we put some of the remarks together we can, however, establish a few characteristics of how he understood the word. Most important is, of course, the above quoted passage from his autobiography. When in that passage al-Ghazālī evokes the notion of *fiṭra*, he clearly alludes to the popular understanding that the *fiṭra* will lead all humans to become Muslims rather than Christians, Jews, or Zoroastrians. The *Deliverer from Error* was at the end a book not written for other theologians or jurists but rather for a wider readership of people who are interested, for instance, in the dispute between the different theological groups in Islam or the conflict between reason and revelation. A close reading of the text, however, reveals that while invoking the notion of a close connection between *fiṭra* and Islam al-Ghazālī also demolishes that idea. He quotes the *ḥadīth* in the context of his own destruction of things he had learned "from parents and teachers." Al-Ghazālī's parents and teachers were Muslims, yet he says that to them also applies what applies to Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians, namely that their teachings obstruct the natural human disposition. Disposition towards what, one must ask?

A simple answer is: disposition towards truth. In his autobiography — and particularly in the chapter where he quotes the *fiṭra* tradition — al-Ghazālī tells the story of how he searched for certain knowledge (*ʿilm yaqīnī* or *ḥaqīqat al-ʿilm*).[15] Rejection of *taqlīd* and reliance on *fiṭra* are important steps in that search. Uncritical emulation (*taqlīd*) only obstructs the truth, while *fiṭra* leads towards it. Later on in his autobiography al-Ghazālī clarifies that the *fiṭra* does not already contain the answer to the question of truth. At the initial stages of this process, the *fiṭra* is described as having no knowledge of the world. At the beginning of the chapter on prophecy in the *Deliverer from Error*, al-Ghazālī clarifies:

obedience and disobedience. The latter approach allows Ibn Taymiyya to stress human responsibility and the human's ostensible free decision — and thus seemingly adopt a number of Muʿtazilite positions — while still maintaining God's predestination.

[14] See Adang, "Islam as the Inborn Religion of Mankind: The Concept of *Fiṭrah* in the Works of Ibn Ḥazm."

[15] al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl*, 11.7–10.

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> Know that the substance (*jawhar*) of a human in the initial original disposition (*fī aṣl al-fiṭra*) is created blank and plain, without having any information about the worlds of God.[16]

The *fiṭra* is for al-Ghazālī a means that enables all humans to reach the truth.[17] While it initially knows nothing about the world, once it begins working it is not empty. In fact, in the 21st book of his *Revival of the Religious Sciences* (*Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*) on the dispositions of the human soul al-Ghazālī describes the *fiṭra* as a body of knowledge that leads to other knowledge. Talking about how we acquire new "pieces of knowledge" (singl. *ʿilm*) that we did not have before, al-Ghazālī clarifies:

> If the knowledge that is searched for is not from the original disposition (*fiṭriyya*) it will only be hunted up with a net of [earlier] knowledge that one had already reached at.[18]

The metaphor of hunting for knowledge with a net of earlier knowledge describes the process of logical reasoning — understood in terms of Aristotelian syllogistics — where every piece of new knowledge or every new judgment, "is only acquired from two earlier judgments that are combined and paired in a certain way." Two premises combine in a syllogism to establish the truth of the conclusion. Yet with regard to the knowledge that comes from the *fiṭra* we need no premises. No syllogistic argument is required to acquire this kind of knowledge.

There are two important passages in al-Ghazālī's *Revival of the Religious Sciences* that shed further light on the meaning of *fiṭra*. In both passages al-Ghazālī explains the meaning of the word "intellect" (*ʿaql*). The first is in the 29th book of his *Revival*: "I mean by it (*scil.* the intellect) the inborn original disposition and the initial light through which people perceive the essences of things."[19] Cleverness and smartness are part of the *fiṭra*, al-Ghazālī continues, as are stupidity and foolishness. "A sound intellect and an acute understanding must be from within the *fiṭra*, because if a human does not have them in the *fīṭra* then [he won't have them all] as acquiring them is impossible."

The second passage that explains "intellect" is at the end of the first book of the *Revival*, the *Book of Knowledge* (*Kitāb al-ʿIlm*). The word "intellect" is homonymous and has various meanings, al-Ghazālī says, of which he will explain four. The first meaning refers to that what distinguishes humans from animals, which is "the inborn capacity

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[16] Ibid., 41.3–4.

[17] "Through the original disposition (*bi-l-fiṭra*) every soul (*qalb*) is able to achieve knowledge of the true meanings [of things] (*al-ḥaqāʾiq*)." Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, 5 vols. (Cairo: Muʾassasat al-Ḥalabī wa-Shurakāʾhu, 1387/1967–68), 3:19.11. Cf. also the parallel print: *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, 16 parts in 6 vols. (Cairo: Lajnat Nashr al-Thaqāfa al-Islāmiyya, 1356–57 [1937–39]), 8:1369.9–10. References to the latter print will be added in brackets.

[18] Ibid., 3:18.23–24 (8:1368.19–20). See also the description of the *fiṭra* at the beginning of the 7th *bayān* that follows this remark, 3:21–22 (8:1372–73).

[19] *aʿnī bihi al-fiṭra al-gharīziyya wa-l-nūr al-aṣlī alladhī bihi yudriku l-insān ḥaqāʾiq al-umūr*; ibid., 3:508.23 — *ult.* (11:2066.18–21).

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(*gharīza*) through which one is prepared for the acquisition of theoretical knowledge (*al-ʿulūm al-naẓariyya*)."[20] *All* theoretical knowledge that is, and not only that which is common to all humans but also that, for instance, which we accept from parents and teachers. While this is not the *fiṭra*, the latter has a role in the acquisition of theoretical knowledge: "It is like as if [all theoretical] knowledge is included in this inborn capacity (*gharīza*) through the *fiṭra*, yet it will appear and come into existence [only] if there occurs a cause (or: reason, *sabab*) that brings it out into existence."[21] This cause or reason is likely the earlier knowledge in the form of premises that al-Ghazālī had mentioned above, but also other things that "cause" knowledge such as sense perception, for instance. According to this first meaning of "intellect," the knowledge produced by the intellect comes about firstly "through the original disposition" (*bi-l-fiṭra*) and secondly through a cause. Apparently, both need to be present to produce theoretical knowledge.

The second understanding of "intellect" in al-Ghazālī's list stands for the *fiṭra* itself. "Intellect" also means, so al-Ghazālī, a kind of knowledge that appears already in infants and that distinguishes by assessing what is possible and what is impossible, such as knowing that two is greater than one and that one person cannot be at two places at the same time.[22] Here, in the first book of his *Revival*, al-Ghazālī does not call this kind of knowledge *fiṭra*. We will see, however, that this is a more or less straightforward adaptation of a passage in Avicenna's *Book of Definitions* (*Kitāb al-Ḥudūd*) — which itself is adopted from chapter II.19 in Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* — and that Avicenna calls this kind of intellect "the initial original disposition" (*al-fiṭra al-ūlā*). All through his works, al-Ghazālī keeps his remarks on *fiṭra* short and scattered. Without support from other sources — and here I mean the teachings of Avicenna — it would be quite difficult to truly determine what he has in mind when he uses the word.

If we look at al-Ghazālī's two textbooks of logic, the *Standard of Knowledge* (*Miʿyār al-ʿilm fī fann al-manṭiq*) and the *Touchstone of Reasoning* (*Miḥakk al-naẓar*), we find in the latter numerous appearances of the word "*fiṭra*" but again no single clear explanation. Al-Ghazālī remarks in his *Touchstone of Reasoning*, for instance, that moral judgments such as "lying is bad" are not part of the *fiṭra* because they are not unaffected by doubt. Rather, these judgments are conventions acquired from other people. This passage is instructive since al-Ghazālī clarifies that the *fiṭra* consists of two parts:

> Neither the original disposition of the estimative faculty (*fiṭrat al-wahm*) nor the original disposition of the intellect (*fiṭrat al-ʿaql*) judge that lying is bad.[23]

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[20] Ibid., 1:118.2–3 (1:145.9). Al-Ghazālī adopts this definition from al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857).
[21] Ibid. 1:120.2–3 (1:147–148).
[22] Ibid., 1:118.16–20 (1:146.1–6). The definition that the intellect is that "what distinguishes by [assessing] the possibility of what is possible and the impossibility of what is impossible," goes back to al-Juwaynī, *al-Irshād*, ed. M. Y. Mūsā and ʿA. ʿA. ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1369/1950), 16.9–10, yet it has a slightly different function there.
[23] al-Ghazālī, *Miḥakk al-naẓar fī l-manṭiq*, ed. M. B. al-Naʿsānī and M. al-Qabbānī (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Adabiyya, w.d. [1925]), 57.16–17. The passage is later repeated in al-Ghazālī, *al-Mustaṣfā min ʿilm*

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The original disposition of the estimative faculty (*fiṭrat al-wahm*) and the original disposition of the intellect (*fiṭrat al-ʿaql*) appear throughout al-Ghazālī's explanation of one particular kind of premises in arguments, the "commonly accepted statements" (*mashhūrāt*).[24] Read closely, these teachings clarify why the *fiṭra* is initially empty of all knowledge of the world and they tell us why the body of knowledge contained in it is not acquired through syllogisms. These passages also clarify why the original *fiṭra* is obstructed by the opinions of parents, teachers, and the intellectual environment.

Should then the fact that al-Ghazālī answers all or most of our questions on *fiṭra* in his *Touchstone of Reasoning* not lead us to study these passages closely? Al-Ghazālī's two textbooks on logic are, as Jules Janssens had already proven for the *Standard of Knowledge*, extensive adaptations, reworkings, and copies of passages in various texts by Avicenna and al-Fārābī.[25] In a similar context, Janssens concludes that, "[n]o serious evaluation of his (*scil.* al-Ghazālī's) personal contribution is possible while these sources and copies remain undetermined."[26] Any close study of how al-Ghazālī understands the epistemological role of *fiṭra* must therefore start with the sources of this understanding. In this paper I will look briefly at earlier Ashʿarite literature and more closely at the writings of al-Fārābī and Avicenna as well as some Avicennan *falāsifa*. This is not to suggest that other genres of literature such as Sufism, for instance, may not also have played a role for al-Ghazālī's understanding of *fiṭra*. We will see, however, that consulting the philosophical notion of *fiṭra* leads to so many interesting results that this paper shall be limited to philosophical literature, leaving the other avenues for future research.

Fiṭra in Ashʿarite Literature before al-Ghazālī

Early Ashʿarite theologians up to the generation of al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085) had a serious problem with the assumption that there is an original disposition of all humans. Their occasionalist ontology was based on the denial of any kind of unrealized potentialities in the created world. Al-Ashʿarī (d. 324/935–36) famously denied that the word "nature" (*ṭabʿ*) — in the sense of an inherent attribute that a thing has or the Aristotelian meaning of a potentiality that it strives to realize — has any meaning. Assuming that things have "natures" (*ṭabāʾiʿ*) that determine their past or future development would limit God's omnipotence and would make it impossible for God, to create a plum tree, for instance, out of an apple seed. Early Ashʿarites up to al-Juwaynī, however, maintained that God has the capacity to create whatever He wants.[27] The idea

al-uṣūl, ed. Ḥ. Ḥāfiẓ, 4 vols. (Medina: al-Jāmiʿa al-Islāmiyya — Kulliyyat al-Sharīʿa, 1413 [1992–93]), 1:153.12–13.

[24] al-Ghazālī, *Miḥakk al-naẓar fī l-manṭiq*, 55–58; *al-Mustaṣfā min ʿilm al-uṣūl*, 1:150–154.

[25] Jules Janssens, "Al-Ghazzālī's *Miʿyār al-ʿilm fī fann al-manṭiq*: sources Avicenniennes et Farabiennes," *Archive d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Age* 69 (2002): 39–66.

[26] Jules Janssens in a review of my *Apostasie und Toleranz* in *Journal of Islamic Studies* 14 (2003): 70.

[27] Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 124–127.

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of an inherent original disposition for humans would be such an unrealized potentiality and it does not fit into early Ashʿarite ontology. Subsequently, we read little — or rather nothing — about it in the major texts of al-Ashʿarī, al-Bāqillāni (d. 403/1013), and al-Juwaynī.[28]

Fiṭra in al-Fārābī

Al-Fārābī uses the word *fiṭra* in a variety of ways. In his *Long Book on Music* (*Kitāb al-Mūsīqī al-kabīr*), for instance, the word *fiṭra* expresses the different original dispositions in regard to how easy or difficult it is for humans to create new melodies.[29] This, we would today call "talent" and it differs widely among humans. Like in other practical arts such as eloquence (*balāgha*) or writing (*kitāba*), talent is helpful but only repeated practice (*ʿāda*) will lead to mastership. This kind of *fiṭra* is responsible for the division of humans in different "groups" (*ṭawāʾif*) and leads some, for instance, to become philosophers while others are more inclined towards practical occupations.[30]

Yet there is a notion of *fiṭra* in al-Fārābī that all humans of sound mind have in common. In his *Political Regime* (*al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*) in a chapter on notions that humans all agree upon, al-Fārābī clarifies that the human original disposition is the ability — or the talent — to receive the first intelligibles. This is a talent that all, or at least most humans have. Those people whose original dispositions are sound (*salīma*) — for al-Fārābī this group excludes dull-witted and insane people — have one common original disposition (*fiṭra mushtarika*) that "makes them ready for the reception of the intelligibles, which are common to all humans who through them pursue the affairs and

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[28] This is a dangerously general and provocative statement that will probably (and hopefully) be corrected or qualified by subsequent research on this subject. I cannot, of course, read through all the relevant books of these authors. Rather, I checked the indices of those works I have at hand and went through their table of contents, among them Ibn Fūrak's *Mujarrad maqālāt al-Ashʿarī*, ed. D. Gimaret (Beirut: Dār al-Machreq, 1986), al-Ashʿarī's *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ* and his *Risālat Istiḥsān al-khawḍ*, ed. R. McCarthy (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1953), the several partly editions of al-Juwaynī's *al-Shāmil fī uṣūl al-dīn* as well as several editions of his *al-Irshād*. For al-Bāqillānī I looked at Samīra Faraḥāt's, *Muʿjam al-Bāqillānī fī kutubihi al-thalāth al-Tamhīd, al-Inṣāf, al-Bayān* (Beirut: al-Muʾassasa al-Jāmiʿiyya li-l-Dirāsāt wa-al-Nashr wa-al-Tawzīʿ, 1991). In addition I consulted Samīḥ Dughaym's *Mawsūʿat muṣṭalaḥāt ʿilm al-kalām al-Islāmiyya*, 2 vols. (Beirut: Librairie du Liban Publishers, 1998) as well as several others lexicons in the *Series of Arabic and Islamic Terminologies Encyclopedias* (*Silsilat Mawsūʿāt al-Muṣṭalaḥāt al-ʿArabiyya wa-Islāmiyya*) established by Samīḥ Dughaym, Rafīq al-ʿAjm, and Gerard Jihāmī. None of these works generated any significant passage that discusses the meaning of the word *fiṭra* or makes use of that notion. In the existing secondary literature on early Ashʿarism the subject of *fiṭra* has never been mentioned as far as I can see.

[29] al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Mūsīqī al-kabīr*, ed. G. ʿA. Khashana and M. A. al-Ḥifnī (Cairo: Dār al-Kātib al-ʿArabī, 1967), 55.5–7. See Yaron Klein, "Imagination and Music: *Takhyīl* and the Production of Music in al-Fārābī's *Kitāb al-Mūsīqī al-Kabīr*," in *Takhyīl: The Imaginary in Classical Arabic Poetics*, ed. Geert J. van Gelder and Marlé Hammond (Cambridge: E.J.W. Gibb Memorial Trust, 2008), 179–195, 184.

[30] Philippe Vallat, *Farabi et l'école d'Alexandrie: Des Prémisses de la connaissance à la philosophie politique* (Paris: Vrin :2004), 223, 302.

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perform the actions that they have in common."[31] Philippe Vallat recently analyzed this and other passages in al-Fārābī and he highlights the important role *fiṭra* plays within his philosophy.[32] For Vallat the *fiṭra* in al-Fārābī is a "natural human norm" and identical to the first intelligibles (*al-maʿqūlāt al-awwal*) that humans have in common and that al-Fārābī in this chapter calls "the first knowledge" (*al-maʿārif al-awwal*).[33] In a less technical and more casual context, al-Fārābī uses the word *fiṭra* synonymously to "intellect."[34] Yet, when looked closely at the passage, *fiṭra* is not the intelligibles as such, but the ability or the talent to receive them. That talent is common to all, or most humans, while no other animal has it.

In his *Political Regime*, al-Fārābī stresses that humans have the intelligibles, their *fiṭra*, and their affairs in common. In his *Book of Letters* (*Kitāb al-Ḥurūf*) this leads to a fourth commonality: language. In this book, al-Fārābī explains the origination of the first human language (*al-lugha al-umma*), i.e. the language of the first human community. The human *fiṭra* plays an important role in why humans were able to agree on a common language. When the first language was formed, the members of the human ur-community reached a spontaneous and immediate agreement on the words and their meanings. This agreement was, according to al-Fārābī, due to the common *fiṭra* of the humans. For al-Fārābī the notion of the human original disposition (*fiṭra*) is closely connected to the intelligibles (*maʿānī*). The original disposition makes humans order words in accord with the established order of the intelligibles. This coherence between words and underlying intelligibles let to the spontaneous accord of those who created language. In his *Book of Letters*, al-Fārābī writes about the process of language formation in the human ur-community:

> Because the original dispositions within this community (*fiṭar tilka al-umma*) were sound (or: in an equilibrilum, *ʿalā l-iʿtidāl*) and because this was a community that was drawn towards acumen (*dhakāʾ*) and knowledge, they searched through their original dispositions (*bi-fiṭarihim*) without [yet being able] to rely on the words which became representations of the intelligibles (*maʿānī*) imitations of the intelligibles (*muḥākāt al-maʿānī*) and made them (*scil.* the words) closely resemble the intelligibles and the beings (*al-mawjūd*). Their souls rose up through their (*scil.* the souls') original dispositions (*bi-fiṭarihā*), because

[31] al-Fārābī, *al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, ed. Fawzī M. Najjār (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1964), 75.4–5.
[32] Vallat, *Farabi et l'école d'Alexandrie*, 280–284.
[33] al-Fārābī, *al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, 74.15–16; Vallat, *Farabi et l'école d'Alexandrie*, 281–282: "(. . .) Farabi apelle *fiṭra insāniyya*, « norme naturelle humaine », cet ensemble d'intelligibles communs à tous les hommes de saine constitution. (. . .) Ces intelligibles *communs* à tous les hommes sont donc en meme temps les intelligibles *premiers*, ceux justement qui assurent depuis l'origine la possibilité d'un langage *commun*." (Emphasis in the original.) and 223: "Farabi s'inscrit dans le prolongement direct de cette doctrine en parlant pour sa part de la « norme naturelle de l'humanité », *fiṭra insāniyya*, qui charactérise tous les hommes de saine constitution et qui constitue pour chacun d'eux une aptitude réceptive à l'égard d'un même ensemble d' « intelligibles premiers » et d'activités communes afférentes, ensemble qui est appelé par métonymie « norme naturelle commune », *fiṭra mushtarika*."
[34] Vallat, *Farabi et l'école d'Alexandrie*, 367.

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> the souls aspired with these words to establish — as much as they could do that with the words — an order according to the [established] order of the intellligibles, so that they strove to express the souls' affairs (*aḥwāluhā*) that resemble the affairs of the intelligibles.[35]

Philippe Vallat sees in al-Fārābī's understanding of *fiṭra* influences of the stoic notion of "natural tendencies" (*principiis naturae*) as well as of the neo-Platonic idea that the *lógoi* flow from the universal soul onto nature and onto the human spirit.[36] *Fiṭra* for al-Fārābī is the disposition — natural to all humans of sane mind — to receive the first intelligibles from the active intellect. This disposition creates an innate (and certain) knowledge that is not acquired through syllogistic arguments.[37] Vallet's analysis shows that there is a certain ambiguity in al-Fārābī: Strictly speaking *fiṭra* is the disposition or the capacity to receive the first intelligibles. In a broader sense, however, the ensemble of the first intelligibles is also called *fiṭra*.

Fiṭra in Avicenna and the Avicennans

While *fiṭra* plays an important role in al-Fārābī's epistemology, the sense we get of this notion is somewhat vague and not very technical. On the one hand, *fiṭra* is what all humans have in common in terms of their epistemic capacities, yet at the same time it is a certain individual talent that divides us and creates the established divisions of labor in society. Avicenna, who understood himself as a follower of al-Fārābī and someone who would complete where al-Fārābī had left things off, has a much more precise notion of *fiṭra* that he fully integrates in his epistemological theories.

Avicenna writes about *fiṭra* in his *Book of Definitions* (*Kitāb al-Ḥudūd*) as well as in his various philosophical encyclopedias within the explanation of what kind of premises can be used to produce demonstrative arguments (*barāhīn*).[38] The treatment within the *Book of Definitions* reiterates some notions we are already familiar with from al-Fārābī. There, *fiṭra* appears as an important concept in the definition of the word "intellect" (*ḥadd al-ʿaql*). Avicenna begins that definition by clarifying what ordinary people, i.e. the non-philosophers, call the "intellect:"

> "Intellect" is a homonymous term for various concepts (*maʿānī*). People call the soundness of the first *fiṭra* in humans (*ṣiḥḥat al-fiṭra al-ūlā fī l-nās*) an "intellect"

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[35] al-Fārābi, *Kitāb al-Ḥurūf*, 138, *penult.* — 139.4.

[36] Vallat, *Farabi et l'école d'Alexandrie*, 281: "En definitive, la *fiṭra* et les *fiṭar* (plu. de *fiṭra*) occupent structurellement dans la pensée de Farabi la place des *logoi spermatiques* qui eminent de l'Âme et se développent dans la Nature en l'organisant du dedans selon un plan rationnel."

[37] On this type of knowledge in al-Fārābī see Vallat, *Farabi et l'école d'Alexandrie*, 224, with reference to al-Fārābī, *Kitāb Sharāʾiṭ al-yaqīn*, in *Al-Manṭiq ʿinda l-Fārābī*, ed. M. Fakhrī (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1987), 97–104, 101.14–17.

[38] Amélie-Marie Goichon, *Lexique de la langue philosophique d'Ibn Sīnā (Avicenne)* (Paris: Desclee de Brouwer, 1938), 274–276.

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> and [they say] that its definition is: A faculty through which the distinction between what is morally bad and morally good is achieved.[39]

But people also call the universal judgments that they acquire through experience and repeated sense perception an "intellect" or the motives that make humans move or stay in rest. Among the philosophers (*al-ḥukamāʾ*), on the other hand, there are eight different meanings of "intellect." Seven of them describe quite complex phenomena like "the theoretical intellect" (*al-ʿaql al-naẓarī*), the practical intellect (*al-ʿaql al-ʿamalī*), or the material intellect (*al-ʿaql al-hayūlānī*). Only the first intellect mentioned in this list involves the human *fiṭra*. Avicenna explains that this is the intellect which Aristotle describes in his *Posterior analytics*, the fourth book in his *Organon*, dealing with the demonstrative method. Avicenna says that there, Aristotle distinguished between "intellect" (*ʿaql*) and "knowledge" (*ʿilm*):

> He (*scil.* Aristotle) says about the meaning of this intellect that it is the concepts (*taṣawwurāt*) and the judgments (*taṣdīqāt*) that come about in the soul through the original disposition (*bi-l-fiṭra*), and knowledge is that what comes about through acquisition.[40]

This kind of intellect and knowledge are distinct from one another because this intellect is defined as being concepts and judgments that appear within the soul "through the *fiṭra*," (*bi-l-fiṭra*) while knowledge generates "through acquisition" (*bi-l-iktisāb*). What Avicenna seems to refer to in this passage is the difference between primary concepts and demonstration from chapter II.19 in Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*. Regarded as one of his most difficult chapters, Aristotle teaches here that the primary concepts cannot be known "scientifically," i.e. through demonstrative arguments, but are acquired in another cognitive state called *noûs*, a word that is variously translated as "insight," "intuition," or "intelligence." In the Arabic translation that Avicenna had in front of him, the word was most likely translated as *ʿaql*, "intellect."[41] There are various interpretations of this Aristotelian passage, and Avicenna's presentation that this kind of *ʿaql*, i.e. the *noûs* of Aristotle, represents intuitive knowledge that exists before we acquire (*iktasaba*) proper scientific knowledge (*ʿilm*) through demonstrative arguments is one of them. Like demonstrative arguments, this kind of intuition (i.e. *noûs*), says Aristotle, is always true in its apprehension of the primary concepts.[42] Avicenna's rephrasing, however, is very

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[39] Ibn Sīnā, *Kitāb al-Ḥudūd*, ed. A.-M. Goichon (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1963), 11.9–12.1. Cf. the English translation in Kiki Kennedy-Day, *Books of Definition in Islamic Philosophy: The Limits of Words* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 102.

[40] Ibn Sīnā, *Kitāb al-Ḥudūd*, 12.8–9. Cf. Kennedy-Day, *Books of Definition*, 103.

[41] In the extant Arabic translation of the *Posterior Analytics* in MS Paris, BN Ar. 2346, a translation that was most likely done by Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnis (d. 328/940), the word *noûs* is translated as *ʿaql*, see Aristotle, *al-Naṣṣ al-kāmil li-mantiq Arisṭū*, ed. F. Jabr with G. Jihāmī and R. al-ʿAjm, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr al-Lubnānī, 1999), 1:219.

[42] ". . . no other kind of knowledge except intuition (*noûs*) is more accurate than scientific knowledge," Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, 100*b*, 5–10.

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rudimentary and it does not clarify how concepts and judgments appear within the soul "through the *fiṭra*." Are these concepts and judgments, for instance, acquired from the active intellect?

Al-Fārābī had understood this passage of Aristotle in very similar terms as Avicenna and he had also used the term *fiṭra* in this context. In his *Epistle on the Intellect* (*Risāla fi l-ʿaql*), al-Fārābī describes the kind of intellect that Aristotle describes in the *Posterior Analytics* as "necessarily true universal premises" (*al-muqaddimāt al-kulliyya al-ṣādiqa al-ḍarūriyya*). These premises are the "first knowledge" (*al-maʿrifa al-ūlā*) and "the starting points of the theoretical sciences" (*mabādiʾ al-ʿulūm al-naẓariyya*). They are non-syllogistic and non-reflective but available "through the original disposition (*bi-l-fiṭra*) and through nature (*ṭabʿ*), from childhood on and in a way that one doesn't know from where they come or how they come about."[43]

Avicenna explains how they come about. In his own treatments of the subject matter of the *Posterior Analytics* (*Kitāb al-Burhān*), Avicenna talks most extensively about *fiṭra*. The treatment is particular instructive in his shorter compendium *The Salvation* (*al-Najāt*) — shorter than his philosophical encyclopedia *The Healing* (*al-Shifāʾ*) but written in the same period in the last decade of Avicenna's life around 417/1026.[44] In the *Salvation*, Avicenna comments about the relationship of the human's judgments with the *fiṭra* in ways that is more instructive than his treatment of the same subjects in *The Healing* and *Pointers and Reminders* (*al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*).

Avicenna mentions the human original disposition at the very beginning of *The Salvation* in the introduction to the first part on logic. That chapter introduces *taṣawwur* and *taṣdīq*, two key notions in Avicenna's epistemology that we translated above as "concept" and "composed judgment." Here, at the beginning of *The Salvation*, Avicenna aims to clarify the function and the benefit of logic. He starts by explaining that a concept (*taṣawwur*) is acquired through a definition or something that fulfills the function of a definition such as an explanation or an illustration. A "composed judgment" or simply a "proposition" is a combination of at least two concepts and can be either true or false. Composed judgments are acquired through syllogistic arguments or what fulfills the function of an argument. Definitions and syllogistic arguments are two means or tools (singl. *āla*) through which humans acquire knowledge of what has been hitherto unknown. Definitions and arguments, Avicenna adds, can be correct (*ḥaqīqī*), incorrect (*dūna l-ḥaqīqī*) but still in some way useful, or simply false (*bāṭil*). The false can closely resemble those that are correct and true.[45]

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[43] al-Fārābī, *Risāla fī l-ʿaql*, ed. M. Bouyges, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dar El-Machreq, 1983), 8–9. Reading *wa-* instead of *aw-* with most MSS.

[44] Dimitri Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition: Introduction to Reading Avicenna's Philosophical Works* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 112. We do not know when Ibn Sīnā's *Kitāb al-Ḥudūd* was composed.

[45] Ibn Sīnā, *al-Najāt min al-gharq fī baḥr al-ḍalālāt*, ed. M. T. Dānishpazhūh (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Dānishgāh-i Tihrān, 1364/1985), 7.3–8. The text in Dānishpazhūh's edition is often quite different from the one in the earlier edition by M. Ṣabrī al-Kurdī: *Kitāb al-Najāt*, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Saʿāda,

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At this point, Avicenna brings in the notion of *fiṭra* and says that the "original human disposition (*al-fiṭra al-insāniyya*) is in the majority of cases not able to distinguish between these kinds,"[46] i.e. the correct, the incorrect, and the false definitions and arguments. If it would be able to do so, then there would be no disagreements among humans about truth and falsehood and nobody would hold contradictory opinions. That's why we need to study logic, Avicenna argues. Our natural inability to know truth from falsehood forces us to engage in a proper study of the tools to establish truth. At the end of this passage, Avicenna again has a brief reference to the human original disposition:

> This is the benefit of the art of logic; its relationship to analytic thinking (*rawiyya*) is the same as that of grammar to speech and metric rules to poetry. One's sound original disposition (*al-fiṭra al-salīma*), however, and one's sound taste are probably sufficient for knowing grammar and metric rules, yet there is in the natural human dispositions (*al-fiṭar al-insāniyya*) nothing that is so plentifully blessed with practicing analytic thinking that it could dispense to prepare itself for applying this tool (*scil.* logic) — except a human who is assisted by God Exalted.[47]

Here, Avicenna reiterates what he has said before: While the human *fiṭra* may contain a natural talent to know the rules of grammar and of poetic meter, it contains no such talent for the rules of analytic thinking. We may know what is correct in grammar and in poetry through our *fiṭra*, but that *fiṭra* does not contain a similar guide for correct arguments, for instance. Only studying logic can do that.

There is a second, more important discussion of *fiṭra* in Avicenna's *Salvation*. Like in his *Book of Definitions*, Avicenna mentions *fiṭra* in the context of the first intelligibles that we acquire. In the part that is equivalent to Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*, Avicenna discusses which kind of propositions can be considered certain knowledge so that we can employ them as premises in syllogistic arguments and thus produce demonstrations (singl. *burhān*) whose conclusions are certain and indubitable. This is an important part in Avicenna's discussion of how to produce demonstrative arguments, which are the keystone to his philosophical system. Demonstrative arguments rely on certain premises, which makes the distinction of propositions into certain or doubtful so vital for Avicenna's philosophy.

1357/1938), 3.7–12. Not all variants of al-Kurdī's edition are noted in Dānishpazhūh's text and the two editions should be used in conjunction.

[46] Ibn Sīnā, *al-Najāt*, ed. Tehran 7.9–10, ed. Cairo 3.12–13. Cf. also Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifāʾ, al-Manṭiq, al-Madkhal*, ed. G. C. Qanawātī, M. al-Khuḍayrī, and F. al-Ahwānī (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Amīriyya, 1952), 16–17.

[47] Ibn Sīnā, *al-Najāt*, ed. Tehran 9.4–8, ed. Cairo 5.1–5. Cf. *al-Shifāʾ*, *al-Manṭiq*, al-*Madkhal*, 19.8–15, 20.13–19. The latter text is translated and analyzed by Yahya Michot in his introduction to Ibn Sīnā, *Lettre au vizir Abû Saʿd*, ed. and transl. Y. Michot (Beirut: Les Éditions Al-Bouraq: 1421/2000), 69–70, 72. The human who is assisted (*muʾayyad*) by God in finding the truth through his original disposition is, of course, the prophet.

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Avicenna discusses the kinds of premises one by one. In the *Salvation*, he mentions nine different kinds of propositions. A proposition is defined as something that can be true or false. For the purposes of this article, only three of these nine kinds are important: (1) those that come from the faculty of estimation (*wahmiyyāt*), (2) the first intelligibles (*al-awwaliyyāt*), and (3) judgments that are "widely spread" (*dhāʾiʿāt*) among the people about what is right and wrong. The other six are: (1) judgments based on sense perception (*al-maḥsūsāt*) such as "snow is white," (2) those that are based on experience (*al-mujarrabāt*), i.e. repeated sense perception, such as "scammony is a laxative," or "the heavens have observable motions,"[48] (3) those that are acquired by reliable transmission from other people (*mutawātarāt*) such as our knowledge about countries that we ourselves did not visit, (4) accepted judgments (*maqbūlāt*), i.e. religious convictions that we have taken from prophets and religious leaders, (5) conjectured judgments (*maẓnūnāt*) that one tends to hold true without methodological foundation, and (6) imaginations (*mutakhayyalāt*), i.e. things that are completely wrong, mostly due to a misidentification.[49]

The fifth group of judgments is those based on "estimation" (*wahm*; *aestimatio* in the medieval Latin translations). Avicenna discusses this category in greater detail than the first four and informs us that these are often not true. They are simply opinions (*arāʾ*) or convictions (singl. *iʿtiqād*) that humans have based on their faculty of estimation (*quwwat al-wahm*) which produces judgments on the basis of sense perceptions. Estimation (*wahm*) is in Avicenna one of the inner faculties of humans that provides an immediate knowledge connected with a certain sense perception. Adherent to sensible perceptions there exist certain "entities" (*maʿānī*) that are non-material and that the faculty of sense perception (*al-ḥiss*) with its five external senses therefore cannot perceive. These entities are accidents (singl. *ʿaraḍ*), i.e. entitative attributes that inhere in the sensually perceived things.[50] While not accessible through the five external senses,

[48] On this particular category of knowledge in Ibn Sīnā see my remarks in Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 208–212, and the literature I discuss there. Ibn Sīnā uses the example of scammony as a judgment of experimentation because its laxative effect is considered a result on an unknown *accidental* attribute in that plant. Were the effect the result of something *essential* we would know it not through experience (*tajriba*) but through induction (*istiqrāʾ*) by acquiring the concept of scammony from the active intellect.

[49] Ibn Sīnā, *al-Najāt*, ed. Tehran 113–123; ed. Cairo 61–66. There is a similar passage in Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, 55–64 (6th *nahj* in the logic) that discusses the different kinds of premises in a more systematic way though does not comment as extensively on their relationship to *fiṭra* (it does so in the passage on the *mashhūrāt*). These ideas are also treated in Ibn Sīnā's grand encyclopedia *al-Shifāʾ, al-Manṭiq, al-Burhān*, ed. A. ʿAfīfī (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Amīriyya, 1375/1956), 63–67. In his different works, Ibn Sīnā changes the technical termini used to name these kinds of judgments. In *al-Ishārāt*, for instance, there are ten categories of judgments (not including those terms that are used to structure them), in *al-Shifāʾ* there are fourteen of them, which are conveniently listed in *al-Shifāʾ, al-Manṭiq, al-Burhān*, 67.13–16.

[50] Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifāʾ, al-Manṭiq, al-Madkhal*, 13.11–18, English transl. in Michael E. Marmura, "Avicenna on the Division of the Sciences in the *Isagoge* of his *Shifaʾ*," *Journal of the History of Arabic Science* (Aleppo) 4 (1980): 239–250, esp. 245, reprinted in Marmura, *Probing in Islamic Philosophy*.

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the inner faculty of estimation (*al-quwwa al-wahmiyya; vis/virtus aestimativa* in the medieval Latin translations) perceives those accidents. As examples, Avicenna refers to apperceptions and emotions, such as pleasantness, painfulness, friendship, and hostility that we associate with certain sense perceptions. A mother perceives loving pleasure with seeing her child. Estimation exists as a faculty also in some animals, and a standard example given by Avicenna is the sheep's immediate knowledge that the wolf is dangerous. The sheep knows this danger even when it sees the wolf for the first time. This knowledge cannot come from experience — that would be fatal in this case — and it cannot be apprehended from the active intellect since that way of knowing is not accessible to a sheep. It must be from a third source of knowledge that knows the danger just as it knows the wolf has four legs. Seeing the wolf for the first time and knowing its danger is one and the same.[51] The accident (*ʿaraḍ*) responsible for that perception must be one of relation and thus is relevant not to all subjects who perceive the sensible object. In the example of the sheep and the wolf, an accident of the wolf would be "dangerous to sheeps," a quality that a bear, for instance, would not consider relevant even if the bear perceives it in his *wahm*. Similarly a mother perceives the accident "pleasant to her mother" in her child, while a stranger, who may perceive the same accident, will pay no attention to it and remain indifferent to the child.

In humans the perception of these entities or accident leads the faculty of estimation to form universal judgments.[52] A proposition that we acquire through estimation is, for instance: "Either the universe ends in a vacuum or the plenum (*al-malāʾ*), i.e. the space that is filled with matter, is infinite." This is a conviction that everybody among the ordinary people holds true. A second example is the opinion that everything that exists is spatially extended (*mutaḥayyiz*). This, Avicenna says, is "a judgment that all naturally disposed estimations (*al-awhām al-fiṭriyya*) find true." These two examples of judgments of estimation (*wahmiyyāt*) are, however, both false. Yet there are true judgments of estimation "that the intellect confirms" such as: It is impossible to assume that two

Studies in the Philosophies of Ibn Sīnā, al-Ghazālī and Other Major Muslim Thinkers (Binghampton (N.Y.): Global Academic Publishing, 2005), 1–15, esp. 7–8.

[51] On *wahm* in Ibn Sīnā see Deborah L. Black, "Estimation (*wahm*) in Avicenna: The Logical and Psychological Dimensions," *Dialogue. Canadian Philosophical Review* 32 (1993): 219–258, Robert E. Hall, "The *Wahm* in Ibn Sina's Psychology," in *Intellect et imagination dans la Philosophie Médiévale / Intellect and Imagination in Medieval Philosophy / Intelecto e imaginação na Filosofia Medieval*, ed. M. C. Pacheco and J. F. Meirinhos, 3 vols. (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers. 2005), 1:533–549, as well as the insightful observations on *wahm* in connection to "experience" (*tajriba*) in Hall's, "A Decisive Example of the Influence of Psychological Doctrine in Islamic Science and Culture: Some Relationships between Ibn Sī nā's Psychology, Other Branches of His Thought, and Islamic Teachings," *Journal for the History of Arabic Science* (Aleppo) 3 (1979): 46–84, at 54–73, and Jean R. Michot, *La destinée d'homme selon Avicenne. Le retour à Dieu (maʿād) et l'imagination* (Leuven: Peeters, 1986), 147–153.

[52] Ibn Sīnā nowhere says that animals also perform this step. The sheep may perceive the danger of the wolf, but it may not be able to form the corresponding universal judgment that all wolves are dangerous to sheep.

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bodies are at in one place, or that one body is at the same time in two different places. Things like that do not exist and are not intelligible.[53]

These judgments of estimation, Avicenna continues, are very powerful in our minds. Only the intellect (*ʿaql*) can determine which ones are false among them. Yet despite their falsehood, the faculty of estimation does not abandon them. In fact, we find ourselves initially (*fī bādiʾ al-amr*) unable to distinguish between the judgments of the estimation and the first intelligibles (*al-awwaliyyāt al-ʿaqliyya*) since the two resemble each other closely. Avicenna implies that both the judgments of the estimation and the first intelligibles come with the human original disposition (*fiṭra*). If we try to take recourse to our original disposition in order to distinguish between these two, we find that it fools us by suggesting that both of them are always true, i.e. they are necessary, and cannot be doubted.

Applied to a judgment the attribute "necessary" (*ḍarūrī* or *lāzim*) means for Avicenna that the judgment's truth must be acknowledged by everybody in every circumstance and that nobody with a sound mind would say it is false.[54] In the context of the human *fiṭra* it means, as we will see, that judgments appear to be always true and that there are no circumstances under which we would doubt their truth. In the *Posterior Analytics* of his *Healing*, Avicenna explains the kind of necessity that the judgments of the *fiṭra* produce. The necessity of a judgment can be of two kinds, it can either be "outwardly" or "from outside" (*ẓāhirī*) like in the case of the judgments of sense perception (*ḥiss*), experimentation (*ṭajriba*), or those that rely on trustworthy transmissions from other people (*tawātur*), or the necessity can be "inwardly" or "from inside" (*bāṭinī*). This latter kind of necessity is produced by the intellect or by other inner faculties. We may assume that Avicenna refers here to estimation. The intellect and the other inner faculties also acquire parts of their knowledge from sources other than themselves. The most important source would be the separate active intellect. But there is knowledge within the human intellect and other human inner faculties that is produced without "seeking assistance" (*mustaʿīna*) from a source. Avicenna calls this knowledge "the pure intellect" (*mujarrad al-ʿaql*) and identifies the first intelligibles as being part of this. It is this kind of knowledge that he connects to the inborn ability of a human (*badīha*, *gharīza*, and *fiṭra*).[55]

Together with the first intelligibles and the judgments of the estimative faculty, there is a third component of the human *fiṭra*. Avicenna mentions it only in the *Posterior Analytics* of his *Healing*, as far as I can see, in a difficult passage that has already been misunderstood by Western interpreters.[56] ʿUmar ibn Sahlān al-Sāwī (d. *c.* 540/1145), a

[53] Ibn Sīnā, *al-Najāt*, 116.3–8, ed. Cairo 62.6–10.

[54] Al-Ghazālī expresses this Avicennan understanding when he writes in his *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, 3:24.12 (8:1376.7): "Know that knowledge that is not necessary (*laysat ḍarūriyya*), [meaning the knowledge] that the hearts [= the souls] acquire only in certain circumstances, circumstances that differ with regard to how knowledge is acquired, (. . .)."

[55] Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifāʾ*, *al-Manṭiq, al-Burhān*, 63–64; *al-Shifāʾ*, *al-Manṭiq, al-Madkhal*, 16–17.

[56] Michael E. Marmura, "Ghazali's Attitude to the Secular Sciences and Logic," in *Essays on Islamic Philosophy and Science*, ed. G. F. Hourani (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975), 100–111,

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faylasūf who lived contemporaneous to al-Ghazālī three generations after Avicenna, includes a paraphrase of this passage in his compendium of logic.[57] Once that is taken into account, the original passage gets somewhat clearer. It is related to Avicenna's distinction between necessary knowledge where the necessity comes from the inside (*bātīn*) and where the necessity comes from the outside (*ẓāhir*). When humans form syllogistic arguments, they need so-called middle terms (singl. *al-ḥadd al-awsaṭ*) to connect the minor premise with the major. In the example: "All Athenians are humans. All humans are mortal. Thus: All Athenians are mortal," the word "humans" is the middle term. It must appear in both premises, the minor and the major, to allow a syllogism to work and it does not appear in the conclusion. Middle terms of syllogisms are most often universal concepts that we acquire from the active intellect. "Humanness" (*insāniyya*) is such an acquired concept and as a cognition it is not part of the original disposition. Knowledge from the active intellect is for Avicenna an acquisition (*kasb*) of the human intellect and would produce a necessity that comes "from outside" (*ẓāhirī*). Sometimes, however, a "principle" (singl. *mabdāʾ*), i.e. a primary concept, functions as the middle term in a syllogism. These primary concepts are readily available in the mind (*ḥāḍir li-l-dhihn*), Avicenna says. They are "from inside" (*bāṭinī*) of the intellect and they are such concepts as "being" (*al-mawjūd*), "thing" (*al-shayʾ*), "cause" (*al-ʿilla*), or "universal" (*al-kullī*).[58] We need no definition, sense perception, or experience in order to know these primary concepts. Paraphrasing Avicenna, al-Sāwī explains that there are judgments that we know through a syllogism whose middle term is such a primary concept. Such a syllogism, where a primary concept appears in the minor and the major premise, produces knowledge without the need for any kind of acquired knowledge.[59] An example is: "Four is an even number" (*kull arbaʿa zawj*). The middle term of the syllogism that produces this conclusion is "divisible in two equal parts" (*munqasima bi-mutaṣāwiyyayn*) which is a primary concept. The judgment, "Four is an even number," is for Avicenna and al-Sāwī, "a premise whose syllogism is from the original

110, note 20, and Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, 170, understood this passage to mean that the mental process of grasping the middle term of a syllogism — an ability that Ibn Sīnā calls *ḥads* — is part of the *fiṭra*. Yet only a certain kind of *ḥads* is dealt with here.

[57] al-Sāwī, *al-Baṣāʾir al-Nāṣiriyya fī ʿilm al-manṭiq*, with the notes of M. ʿAbduh ed. R. al-ʿAjm (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr al-Lubnānī, 1993), 222–223. Al-Sāwī wrote this treatise on logic *c.* 525/1130.

[58] Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifāʾ, al-Manṭiq, al-Burhān*, 65.5–6, gives an incomplete lists of the primary concepts: being (*al-mawjūd*), thing (*al-shayʾ*), cause (*al-ʿilla*), beginning (*al-mabdāʾ*), universal (*al-kullī*), particular (*al-juzʾī*), and end (*al-nihāya*). In *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, 153.9–10, Ibn Sīnā adds the modalities: "In the first intellect (*al-ʿaql al-awwal*) it is clear that everything that did not exist and then exist is preponderant of one of the two sides of its possibility (*scil.* possible or impossible)." For a brief clarification of the primary concepts in Ibn Sīnā see Michael E. Marmura, "Avicenna on Primary Concepts in the Metaphysics of his *al-Shifāʾ*," in *Logos Islamicos: Studia Islamica in honorem Georgii Michaelis Wickens* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984), 219–239, reprinted in Marmura, *Probing in Islamic Philosophy*, 149–169.

[59] *min ghayr ḥāja ilā kasbihi*; Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifāʾ, al-Manṭiq, al-Burhān*, 64.8.

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disposition" (*muqaddimat fiṭriyyat al-qiyās*).[60] "Premise," here means "judgment" or even "conclusion" and is used because in this chapter Avicenna and al-Sāwī deal with the premises of demonstrative arguments. The conclusion "Four is an even number," will be the premise in the next demonstrative argument.[61] Judgments like these are part of the *fiṭra* because their truth is established by arguments whose premises, including the middle term, are also part of the *fiṭra*.[62]

This latter remark further clarifies what Avicenna means by *fiṭra*. He does not think of *fiṭra* as a certain technique, like finding the middle term of an argument (*ḥads*) or even the ability to construct correct syllogisms. Rather, he thinks of *fiṭra* as judgments or statements that all humans are able to form regardless of their education or their upbringing. For Avicenna, *fiṭra* is not *a priori* knowledge — the *wahmiyyāt* are certainly not *a priori* but require sense perception — but rather knowledge that all humans have in common. Unlike early modern Western thinkers such as René Descartes or Immanuel Kant, Avicenna is not interested in the question of what is *a priori* knowledge.[63] He is rather interested to find out which kind of knowledge do all humans find true if they have only sense perception at their disposal, without being influenced by education, the opinions of other people, or any other factors that come with their individual life circumstances.[64] That this is Avicenna's question is clarified in a thought experiment in his *Salvation*. Here, Avicenna explains what the word "original disposition" means:

> The meaning of "original disposition" (*al-fiṭra*) is that a human imagines himself to appear at once in the world as a mature and intelligent being who has heard no opinions and believed in no religious convictions; he is not associated with a nation (*umma*) nor does he know how to lead his life, but he acquires sense perceptions and from them imaginations (*khayālāt*). Then, based on these, his mind is presented with a thing and he doubts it. If he can doubt it then it [is a kind of judgment that] the original disposition cannot confirm. If he cannot doubt it, it is a kind [of judgment] that the original disposition renders necessary.[65]

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[60] The kind of syllogism al-Sāwī has in mind might look like this: Four is divisible in two equal parts. Every number that is divisible in two equal parts is even. Therefore, four is an even number.

[61] Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā'*, *al-Manṭiq, al-Burhān*, 64.4–12, al-Sāwī, *al-Baṣā'ir al-Nāṣiriyya*, 222.18–223.1. Cf. also the version in al-Sāwī's shorter Persian tractate on logic *Kitāb al-Tabṣīra*, in: *Tabṣīrah ve-dō risalah-yi dīgar dar manṭiq*, ed M. T. Dānishpazhūh (Tehran: Dānishgāh-i Tehrān, 1337 [1958]), 3–125, 105–106. The Arabic word *fiṭra* appears there as Persian *ṭab'*.

[62] Al-Ghazālī adopts the passage from Ibn Sīnā's *al-Shifā'* that deals with these judgments in his *Mi'yār al-'ilm fī fann al-manṭiq*, ed. M. Ṣabrī al-Kurdī (Cairo: al-Maṭbā'a al-'Arabiyya, 1346/1927), 124.13–125.4, yet he does not mention them in his *Miḥakk al-naẓar*.

[63] See Yahya Michot's conclusion in his introduction to Ibn Sīnā, *Lettre au vizir Abû Sa'd*, 73: "(. . .) la pensée du Shaykh al-Ra'îs peut être qualifiée d'anti-naturaliste et anti-innéiste (. . .)."

[64] At the end, Ibn Sīnā was too much of a realist (in terms of the philosophical debate about the real existence of universals, separate from human minds) to become interested in *a priori* knowledge. Knowledge for Ibn Sīnā is triggered by the apprehension of entities that come from outside the human mind, i.e. the outside world or the active intellect, for instance.

[65] This passage mirrors Ibn Sīnā's similar though experiment in *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, 58.13–59.6. On that see Black, "Estimation (*Wahm*) in Avicenna," 240–241.

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> Not all [judgments] that the original disposition of a human renders necessary are true. Many of them are false. Only the original disposition of the faculty that is called "intellect" produces [always] true [judgments]. When it comes to the original disposition of the estimative faculty (*fiṭrat al-wahm*) in general, it is probably false.[66]

In this thought experiment, Avicenna takes everything away from the human and only leaves him or her with sense perceptions. These sense perceptions trigger — via the faculty of imagination — judgments. If these judgments are not susceptible to doubt, they are considered part of the human *fiṭra*. The original disposition (*fiṭra*) of humans has two parts, the faculty of estimation (*wahm*) and the intellect (*ʿaql*). The first produces judgments of estimation (*wahmiyyāt*), the second produces the first intelligibles (*al-awwaliyyāt al-ʿaqliyya*) that we are familiar with from al-Fārābī's writings on *fiṭra* and from the *Book of Definitions*. The latter are the basis of demonstrative reasoning, since from them we are able to construct demonstrative arguments (singl. *burhān*) and produce scientific knowledge. The first intelligibles are always true. They are necessary in the way that one cannot possibly doubt their truths. In contrast, the judgments of estimation are not always true. In fact, looked at "in general" (*bi-l-jumla*), they are "probably" (*rubbamā*) false. Still, the faculty of estimation presents them to us as being necessary. Like the intellect it insists that these judgments cannot be doubted.

Deborah L. Black pointed out that it seems to be an oxymoron to talk about necessary judgments that are not true. This seeming oxymoron is a result of Avicenna's criterion for what is part of the *fiṭra*. The above passage clarifies that judgments of the human *fiṭra* cannot be doubted while all other judgments can. Relying only on the faculty of estimation, one cannot possibly doubt the judgment that all beings are spatially extended. For the faculty of estimation, that judgment is necessary. Once it is considered by the intellect, however, it will turn out to be false. Still, even after such intellectual consideration the faculty of estimation may have a strong hold on the human's soul and lead it to disregard the intellect and maintain the false necessity of its judgment. Like all human faculties, estimation and intellect are of different strength in different humans and some may have a strong estimation and a weak intellect. This can make the human hold false opinions, like in the case of someone believing honey to be unclean because it resembles bile.[67]

The *fiṭra* as a whole produces judgments that are held necessary, i.e. held to be true under all circumstances and not allowing doubts. Yet only some of them *are* always true — the first intelligibles — , while others — the judgments of estimation — may be true or false. Deborah L. Black explained Avicenna's assumptions as follows:

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[66] Ibn Sīnā, *al-Najāt*, ed. Tehran 117.1–9, ed. Cairo 62.13–19. See also the English translation in Black, ""Estimation (*Wahm*) in Avicenna," 233.

[67] Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifāʾ, al-Ṭabīʿiyyāt, al-Nafs = Avicenna's De Anima (Arabic Text) Being the Psychological Part of Kitāb al-Shifāʾ*, ed. F. Rahman (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 182–183, and Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifāʾ*, *al-Manṭiq, al-Burhān*, 63.7.

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> The implication is that each faculty will, when operating in isolation, simply assent to what is in harmony with its own perceptual abilities: no doubt will arise so long as the beliefs formulated by each faculty are internally coherent and consistent.[68]

"Consistent" means here, in the case of the *wahmiyyāt*, consistent with the sense perceptions (*maḥsūsāt*) with which they are connected.

But how can the judgments of estimation be false? Their falsehood has nothing to do with the underlying sense perception itself, Avicenna says, but rather with "the principles the sense perceptions have" (*al-mabādiʾ li-l-maḥsūsāt*). These principles are more general than the sense perception itself, such as assumptions about unity or multiplicity, about the limitations of things, or about cause and effect.[69] When we falsely assume, for instance, that every existent is spatially extended, one might add at this point, we unduly generalize knowledge that we perceive through sense perception to things or objects where this knowledge does not apply.

The relationship between the faculty of estimation and the intellect is, however, more complicated than it would appear from what we read thus far. The faculty of estimation supports all the premises that the intellect (*al-ʿaql*) begins with and which it employs in arguments. Estimation does not contradict these premises and does not dispute them. Should the intellect arrive at contradictory conclusions, this would be because it relied too much on the seemingly self-evident judgments it finds within the faculty of estimation and it neglects to abide by those truths that are truly necessary. Coming to mutually contradictory conclusions reveals that the original disposition (*fiṭra*) has a corrupting influence on true knowledge. Avicenna examines the reason for that:

> The reason for this (*scil.* the corruption of the *fiṭra*) is that the *fiṭra* is an innate disposition (*jibilla*) able to produce concepts (singl. *taṣawwur*) based only on sense perception. An example is the influence that the faculty of estimation has on the intellect when it [first] converses to it that for all premises it is true that there are no existences that have no spatial position and do not exist at a place and then [secondly] prevents it (*scil.* the intellect) from acknowledging the existence of this thing (*scil.* any immaterial being).
>
> The original disposition of the estimative faculty is true (*ṣādiq*) with regard to the sense perceptions and the particular attributes that they have — as long as they can be perceived by the senses. The intellect follows it. The estimative faculty is a tool (*āla*) that the intellect uses with regard to the sense perceptions. However, the original disposition of the sense perceptions is a false (*kādhib*) disposition when it comes to that what is not perceived through the senses because it converts them to sensually perceived existences.[70]

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[68] Black, "Estimation (*wahm*) in Avicenna," 233.
[69] In *al-Shifāʾ, al-Manṭiq, al-Burhān*, 65.5–6, Ibn Sīnā adds that these principles (*mabādiʾ*) are the primary concepts that are "outside of the things that are perceived by the senses."
[70] Ibn Sīnā, *al-Najāt*, ed. Tehran 118.2–9, ed. Cairo 63.2–7.

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The faculty of estimation produces true statements about its own domain, namely the things that we perceive through our senses. Those things, for instance, are all extended in space. Its judgments are taken only from sense perception and from no other source. The corruption (*fasād*) comes into the human original disposition (*fiṭra*) through the interplay of its two elements, faculty of estimation (*wahm*) and intellect (*ʿaql*). The intellect falsely accepts the judgments of estimation as being relevant for objects or situations that cannot be perceived through the external senses. In the two examples Avicenna gives, the intellect assumes that all existences are — like those perceived through the senses — spatially extended and that what applies to our immediate environment also applies to the outer limits of the universe. Avicenna characterizes the influence (*musāʿada*) of the estimative faculty on the intellect as a "whispering" (*intijāʾ*) of judgments that are true for material beings yet not for immaterial ones.

Avicenna says that both the faculty of estimation and the intellect produce true judgments within the domain that they have authority over. The judgments of the faculty of estimation are taken from the sense perception, they are extracted from them one might say, and as such they are true. Confusion and corruption only comes in on the level of the human original disposition (*fiṭra*). Within the *fiṭra*, the epistemological boundaries of the estimative faculty are often overlooked and judgments that should be strictly limited to sense perception are applied to other beings. This happens because the intellect, which is the second element of the original disposition, and which relies on the judgments of estimation with regard to sensibly perceived things, applies these judgments too generally. But the fault not only lies with the intellect; the faculty of estimation seems to make its judgments appealing to more than just things that we perceive through the senses.

If we follow just our original disposition, we might end up with true and false judgments. These judgments are true as long as they apply to objects of sense perceptions — here the faculty of estimation guarantees truths — but they may be false with regard to everything beyond them. That, however, does not mean that what we think we know initially about material objects is all wrong. There are, of course, true judgments of the original disposition and these are the first intelligibles (*al-awwaliyyāt*). In his *Salvation*, Avicenna does not explicitly count them as part of the human *fiṭra*. Yet in other of his works he does and he thus agrees with al-Fārābī on this matter. In his *Salvation* he says that first intelligibles are . . .

> . . . judgments or premises that appear in a human through his intellectual faculty (*quwwa ʿaqliyya*) without any ground (or reason, *sabab*) other than themselves that would necessitate to acknowledge the truth of these judgments.[71]

Or, in simpler words, judgments that are true by themselves without a supporting argument or reason. They come about through the combination of two or more concepts

[71] Ibid., ed Tehran 121.11–122.1, ed. Cairo 64.20–21.

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within the faculty of combining thinking (*quwwa al-mufakkira al-jāmiʿa*). The mind acknowledges the truth of these judgments immediately (*ibtidāʾan*), without another cause (*ʿilla*), and without knowing that this is one of the things that are acquired at once (*fī l-ḥāl*). Rather the human thinks that he had always known it. An example is: "The whole is greater than its parts," or "things that are equal to the same thing are equal to one another." These judgments are not acquired through induction (*istiqrāʾ*, *epagôgé*) from concepts that are derived from the active intellect.

> Acknowledging the truth of this judgment is a natural disposition (*jibilla*), and those judgments that are true among the *wahmiyyāt* are, as we have already said, within this group (*scil.* the first intelligibles).[72]

Judgments of the estimative faculty are — if they turn out to be generally true — first intelligibles. They are generally true when they not only apply to objects of sense perception but to all beings. Regarding the example of the judgment that the whole is greater than its part, Avicenna says, it may well be possible that this is drawn from sense perception — through the faculty of estimation that is. The acknowledgement of truth (*taṣdīq*) in a general sense cannot come from the faculty of estimation (*wahm*). Avicenna says it comes from a natural disposition (*jibilla*), meaning, of course, the intellect.

By now, Avicenna's explanation of the human *fiṭra* as an epistemic capacity is complete. The faculty of estimation (*wahm*) extracts judgments from our sense perceptions. These judgments are notions that are associated with certain sense perceptions in an immediate manner and innately, without recourse to any kind of thinking. Similar to the sheep which has an immediate knowledge of the wolf's danger, humans have an immediate knowledge that sensually perceived objects are all spatially extended, for instance. The faculty of estimation "suggests" (*istadʿā*)[73] to the intellect that these judgments not only apply to objects of sense perception but more generally to all beings. The human original disposition (*al-fiṭra*), which is made up of the faculty of estimation (*wahm*) and of the intellect (*ʿaql*) is often overwhelmed by that suggestion and adopts certain judgments as generally true that are true only for objects of sense perception. This is because the *wahmiyyāt* are very similar to the first intelligbles. At the very beginning Avicenna had said that the natural human disposition (*al-fiṭra*) is in the majority of cases not able to distinguish between what is true and false.[74] Wherever the intellect is sharp and does its proper work, however, it distinguishes between those judgments of the estimative faculty that can truly be generalized and those that cannot. The former are first intelligibles that function as the basis of scientific knowledge, while the latter are dismissed as mere *wahmiyyāt*.[75]

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[72] Ibid., ed Tehran 122.10–123.1, ed. Cairo 65.6–7.

[73] Ibid., ed. Tehran 122.7, ed. Cairo 65.4

[74] Ibid., ed. Tehran 7.9–10, ed. Cairo 3.12–13.

[75] One should note that in its non-technical meaning in Arabic the word *wahm* is often used to denote a false or misleading cognition, i.e. a "delusion" or a "fancy."

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Thus far, Avicenna has clarified what is part of the human original disposition with regard to descriptive judgments that tell us something about the world. But what about normative judgments about what is right or wrong, good and bad, or beautiful and ugly? In the *Salvation* Avicenna considers these types of statements "widely accepted" (*dhāʾiʿāt*) among the people while in his *Pointers and Reminders* he calls them "commonly accepted judgments" (*al-mashhūrāt*).[76] They are held true by everybody, like the statement "justice is good," or by the majority of people or just the learned among them, or sometimes just the best among the learned, while the mass of people do not disagree. These social conventions do not belong to those whose truth is acknowledged by the natural human disposition. "They are not initial as first intelligibles nor as judgments of estimation."[77] They come from outside the original disposition (*ghayr fiṭriyya*). Rather, they are agreed upon by the people (*mutaqarraraʿinda l-anfus*) because through custom people have persistently repeated them since childhood. These judgments are conventions, Avicenna says, whose roots may lie in a desire to live peacefully together or simply in old habits (*sunan qadīma*). They may also spring from certain human character traits (*al-akhlāq al-insāniyya*) such as shame or the desire for companionship.

Avicenna's argument that these judgments are not part of the human *fiṭra* refers back to a point made earlier, namely that the judgments of the original human disposition cannot be doubted. Moral judgments, Avicenna argues, can:

> If you want to know the difference between a widely spread judgment (*al-dhāʾiʿ*) and one that is from the original disposition (*al-fiṭrī*), turn to your claim: "'Justice is good,' and 'lying is bad' are in accord with the original disposition whose affairs we had become familiar with before this chapter." Regarding these two judgments you are affected with doubt, a doubt that you find originating in them and not originating in "the whole is greater than its part," which is an initial truth (*ḥaqq awwalī*) or in "the universe ends in something outside that is [either] a vacuum or a plenum (*malāʾ*)," which is a falsehood from estimation (*bātīl wahmī*).[78]

The latter judgment about the end of the universe is, Avicenna had explained earlier, wrong, yet still it is a necessary judgment, as it cannot be doubted within the faculty of estimation. Avicenna teaches that a wrong judgment is part of the *fiṭra* on account of our inability to doubt it, while these seemingly self-evident moral judgments, which may well be true, are not part of the *fiṭra* because they can be doubted. Later critics were quick to point out the weaknesses of Avicenna's concept of the human original disposition, where wrong judgments are necessary and considered beyond doubt while

[76] Ibn Sīnā, *al-Najāt*, ed. Tehran 117–119, ed. Cairo 63–64; Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ishārāt*, 58–59.
[77] *laysa bi-awwalī ʿaqlī wa-lā wahmī*, Ibn Sīnā, *al-Najāt*, ed. Tehran 119.3, ed. Cairo 63.12–13.
[78] Ibid. ed. Tehran 119.11–15, ed. Cairo 63.18–22. The Cairo edition reads *fiṭrī wahmī* at the end of this passage (instead of *bāṭil wahmī*), which would mean that the latter judgment is "from the *fiṭra* and from estimation."

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moral judgments that we hold universally true and beyond reproach are considered doubtful.[79]

The first intelligibles and the judgments from estimation are also widely spread (*dhāʾiʿ*), says Avicenna, yet he does not identify them with the "widely spread judgments" he discusses here. That is a technical term reserved for social conventions. Some of them may appear praiseworthy "in a self-evident way" (*fī bādiʾ al-raʾi*) but if they were to be applied at face value, they would no longer be praiseworthy such as the maxim: "It is necessary to help one's brother be he an oppressor or be he oppressed."[80]

Moral judgments are for Avicenna not part of the original disposition. The thought experiment concludes that if one were confined solely to one's intellect and one's faculty of estimation, one would not come up with any of them.[81] Michael E. Marmura, who analyzed the passage about moral judgments in Avicenna's *Pointers and Reminders* clarified that Avicenna is not saying moral judgments cannot be true. Many of them are true. Their truth, however, is not self-evident and not accessible to humans simply qua being human, such as the first intelligibles and the true judgments of estimation. Avicenna's ethical theory is teleological, Marmura explains, where acts are valuable if they serve a certain end. That end is for Avicenna the human's happiness in this world and the next. Such happiness is attained when humans actualize their individual potentialities. Acts conducive to this end are good, while those detrimental to it are bad.[82] In themselves, acts have no autonomous moral value for Avicenna, and thus no accidents (*aʿrāḍ*) of moral value that any human faculty could perceive. In his moral theory, Avicenna positions himself squarely against the Muʿtazilite position that every human action has a self-evident moral value. That opposition certainly helped to promote the integration of Avicenna's moral theory — and his views about the human *fiṭra* — into the Ashʿarite theological discourse, a theological school that was founded on opposition to the Muʿtazilite moral theory.

Unlike al-Fārābī, Avicenna seems to use the word "original disposition" (*fiṭra*) in a strictly technical sense mostly for two kinds of premises, the first intelligibles (*awwaliyyāt*) and the judgments of the faculty of estimation (*wahmiyyāt*). They represent a kind of knowledge that all humans have access to, independent of

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[79] One strong objection will come from Ibn Taymiyya who will observe that Ibn Sīnā had already admitted normative judgments as part of the *fiṭra* by including them within the *wahmiyyāt*. If the estimative faculty perceives non-material notions together with the sense perceptions then it will perceive the notion of "good" when it sees a person performing a morally good act just like a sheep perceives "danger" when seeing a wolf. See Black, "Estimation (*Wahm*) in Avicenna," 241–243, and Marmura, "Al-Ghazālī on Ethical Principles," *The Philosophical Forum N.S.* 1.3 [Spring 1969]: 393–398, esp. 397–398, reprinted in Marmura, *Probing in Islamic Philosophy*, 261–265, esp. 265.

[80] In his *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, 59.10–11, Ibn Sīnā adds: "The true is different from the praiseworthy and the false is other than the repulsive; for many a repulsive thing is true and many a praiseworthy thing is false." For the translation see Michael E. Marmura, "Al-Ghazālī on Ethical Principles," 396, reprint 263.

[81] See footnote 66 and Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, 58.13–59.6.

[82] Michael E. Marmura, "Al-Ghazālī on Ethical Principles," 394–395, reprint 262.

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upbringing or education, although "knowledge" should be used with caution since some of these original notions are false and would therefore not constitute knowledge for Avicenna. The first intelligibles, which are always true, and the true judgments of estimation are the premises with which demonstrative reasoning and thus scientific knowledge begins. All this can be seen as an interpretation of chapter II.19 in Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*. In his *Book of Definitions*, Avicenna makes the connection to that chapter explicit.

Fiṭra for Avicenna is a set of necessary judgments whose necessity comes "from inside" (*bāṭinī*) and not from other people or from learning, i.e. acquiring universal concepts from the active intellect. Avicenna does not think of *fiṭra* as a set of abilities of humans, like finding the middle term of a syllogism (*ḥads*) or like being able to argue reasonably. Also, unlike al-Fārābī we did not come across an example where Avicenna uses the word *fiṭra* in a more loose sense as personal talent. Yet that is not true for the whole philosophical movement. That *falāsifa* used the word *fiṭra* also in the sense of "talent" becomes evident from al-Fārābī and from a comment of Bahmanyār ibn al-Marzubān (d. 458/1066), one of Avicenna's students.[83]

Avicenna was no man of modesty and saw himself as someone who had the ability of finding the middle term of a syllogism — of *ḥads* — in far greater quantity than ordinary people. Some people have more *ḥads* than others; philosophers are usually much better at finding the middle terms than ordinary people. In his *De Anima* in *The Healing*, Avicenna has a famous argument saying that since there are some people who have next to no ability to find a middle term, there must be one person who is radiant with this ability, who is the prophet.[84] This is clearly a talent in the same sense as al-Fārābī used the word *fiṭra* for the talent of composing music. Avicenna's student Bahmanyār ibn al-Marzubān saw his teacher as outstandingly talented in this way. At the end of his own encyclopedic book of philosophy he says something about Avicenna and about *fiṭra*:

> It is possible that a person has an original disposition of his material intellect (*fiṭrat ʿaqlihī al-hayūlānī*) that is close to the intellect *in habitu* (*al-ʿaql bi-l-malaka*) and perceives the intelligibles with an abundant *ḥads* without long deliberation or learning. We have seen someone in that state and that is the author of these books (*scil.* Avicenna).[85]

Bahmanyār continues by describing Avicenna's life from his early childhood when he had mastered the sciences to his mature days when he re-ordered them in his books. He uses the technical language of Avicennan psychology where the material intellect —

[83] On Bahmanyār see Hans Daiber's article in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, ed. E. Yarshater, (London, New York, and Cosa Mesa: Routledge & Kegan, Mazda, and Bibliotheca Persica, 1982–), 3:501–503.
[84] Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifāʾ, al-Ṭabīʿiyyāt, al-Nafs*, 249.11–18, see Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, 162.
[85] Bahmanyār ibn al-Marzubān, *al-Taḥṣīl*, ed. M. Muṭahharī (Tehran: Dānishgāh-i Tihrān, 1349/1971), 817.2–3.

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"material" meaning "passive" in the sense that just like prime matter (*hylé*) it can become all things — receives knowledge from the active intellect and becomes the intellect *in habitu*, which has acquired a repertoire of intelligibles without actually thinking them. For Bahmanyār, some passive and receptive intellects are already close to the stage where they have acquired intelligibles so that some people are more talented to acquire intelligibles than others because they have a richer ability to find the middle term (*ḥads*) — a talent that here he calls *fiṭra*.

Conclusions

Understanding the way Avicenna uses the concept of *fiṭra* helps us a long way to also understand al-Ghazālī. Many of the teachings that we have just discussed are included in al-Ghazālī's textbook of logic *The Touchstone of Reasoning* (*Miḥakk al-naẓar*). It has already been said that al-Ghazālī wrote two textbooks of logic, the *Touchstone of Reasoning* and the *Standard of Knowledge* (*Miʿyār al-ʿilm fī fann al-manṭiq*) at roughly the same time around 488/1095, parallel to or shortly after his occupation with the *Incoherence of the Philosophers* (*Tahāfut al-falāsifa*). Both are adaptations of passages in Avicenna's and al-Fārābī's books. This brings up the problem of whether al-Ghazālī was fully committed to all the teachings he lays down in these two books? This question is unresolved in the case of the *Standard of Knowledge*. Some teachings at the end of the book in metaphysics raise doubts.[86] In the case of *Touchstone of Reasoning*, however, we can be sure that al-Ghazālī was fully committed to its teachings even late in his life. When writing the introduction on logic for his *Choice Essentials in the Science of the Methods [of Jurisprudence]* (*al-Mustaṣfā minʿilm al-uṣūl*), one of al-Ghazālī's latest works written after 500/1106, he re-used the text of the *Touchstone of Reasoning* almost verbatim. The influential position of al-Ghazālī's *Choice Essentials* within Muslim discourses on the methods of jurisprudence means that these teachings were widely read in later centuries.[87]

Just like Avicenna, al-Ghazālī includes in his textbooks of logic a discussion of judgments or statements that are considered certain (*yaqīnī*) and that can be used as premises in demonstrative arguments. The chapter in the *Touchstone of Reasoning* relies heavily on Avicenna's *Pointers and Reminders* and maybe also on *The Salvation*, though it introduces some changes. It lists seven kinds of judgments: (1) the first intelligibles (*al-awwaliyyāt*), (2) perceptions of the five inner senses (*al-mushāhadāt al-bāṭina*) such as hunger, for instance, (3) judgments based on the five outer senses (*al-maḥsūsāt al-ẓāhira*) (4) those that are based on experience (*al-tajribiyyāt*), (5) those that are acquired by reliable transmission from other people (*al-maʿlūmāt bi-l-tawātur*) (6) the

[86] See my *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, 271–272.

[87] On the influential position of the *al-Mustaṣfā* within *ʿilm uṣūl al-fiqh* see Wael B. Hallaq, "Logic, Formal Arguments, and Formalization of Arguments in Sunnī Jurisprudence," *Arabica* 37 (1990): 315–358; reprinted in Wael B. Hallaq, *Law and Legal Theory in Classical and Medieval Islam* (Aldershot [UK]: Ashgate, 1994), ch. III.

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judgments of estimation (*wahmiyyāt*), and (7) commonly accepted statements (*al-mashhūrāt*). While the first intelligibles are always true, the six other kinds of judgments can include certain ones, though they can also include false ones.[88]

We do not need to go into the details of these kinds of judgments. Regarding the three that are most relevant for us — the first intelligibles (*al-awwaliyyāt*), the judgments of estimation (*wahmiyyāt*), and the commonly believed statements (*al-mashhūrāt*) — al-Ghazālī reproduces most of the teachings of Avicenna. His changes are limited to omissions that might be deliberate or not. For instance, al-Ghazālī does not say that the faculty of estimation (*wahm*) perceives an "entity" (*maʿnā*), i.e. an accident (*ʿaraḍ*) that is associated with the sense perception — an assumption that might conflict with al-Ghazālī's ontological assumptions. He also omits Avicenna's discussion of why the *wahmiyyāt* lead to corruption within the *fiṭra*. In general, he does not include Avicenna's ontological explanations of how the faculty of estimation and thus the *fiṭra* works. Similarly, al-Ghazālī replaces sometimes — though not always — the Avicennan words *ḍarūra* and *ḍarūrī* ("necessity" and "necessary," i.e. true under every circumstance and always) with *qaṭʿan* and *qaṭʿī* ("decisively true"), probably because he had severe objections to how Avicenna understood modalities such as necessity.[89] With the exception of such details, however, we find almost all teachings of Avicenna on these three kinds of judgments either spelled out by al-Ghazālī or at least hinted at. Al-Ghazālī's presentation is lively and rather than copying whole passages or even sentences from Avicenna he uses his own language. As in other of such adaptations from philosophical literature, there is a clear attempt to make these teachings more easily accessible than in their presentation by Avicenna himself and to provide more examples.[90] Of course, al-Ghazālī does not inform his readers from where he took these teachings and he sometimes introduces small and inconsequential changes in the terminology, maybe in an attempt do disguise their provenience.

Like in Avicenna, *fiṭra* is for al-Ghazālī a set of judgments that all humans agree upon, no matter how they live and what they have learned. It is distinct from the rational capacity to derive theoretical knowledge from earlier ones by the use of arguments. The latter is often referred to as "intellect" (*al-ʿaql*) or also as an "inborn capacity" (*gharīza*) and it is pure potentiality or "a preparedness" (*tahayyuʾ*) for the acquisition of all sorts of theoretical knowledge.[91] *Fiṭra*, however, is a stock of judgments that are considered primary. Not all humans have that stock in equal measure. Al-Ghazālī repeats Avicenna's analysis that *fiṭra* may well contain false judgments — namely from among the judgments of estimation — and that these false *wahmiyyāt*, "are indistinguishable in the

[88] al-Ghazālī, *Miḥakk al-naẓar fī l-manṭiq*, 47–58; *al-Mustaṣfā*, 1:134–154. I also deal with this chapter and the parallel one in *Miʿyār al-ʿilm fī fann al-manṭiq*, 121–135, in my *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, 204–213, where I focus on the judgments of experimentation (*tajriba*).

[89] Cf. my *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, 162–172.

[90] Cf. Frank Griffel, "MS London, British Library Or. 3126: An Unknown Work by al-Ghazālī on Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 17 (2006): 1–42, esp. 16.

[91] See note 20.

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soul from the first intelligibles that are decisively true." Only the faculty of the intellect (*quwwat al-ʿaql*) and only a "rational argument" (*dalīl al-ʿaql*) can decide which *wahmiyyāt* are always true.[92] This is where humans differ, and for some the *wahm* is stronger than the intellect, which may lead them, for instance, to believe in an anthropomorphic God. The first intelligibles (*awwaliyyāt*) are for al-Ghazālī judgments, "where the intellect commits itself intuitively (*ʿalā l-badīha*) to whether they are true or false."[93] Examples are: "A human's knowledge of his own existence (*bi-wujūd dhātihi*), that one thing cannot both be eternal and created in time, that direct contradictions cannot both be true, and that two is greater than one."

Al-Ghazālī devotes considerable attention to the question of how the "commonly accepted judgments" (*mashhūrāt*) relate to the human *fiṭra*. As examples al-Ghazālī lists moral statements: "lying is bad," "bestowing benefits is good," and "thanking the benefactor is good." These are mere social conventions, al-Ghazālī says, and they may be true or false. Most of all they are not part of the initial human disposition (*al-fiṭra al-ūlā*), neither the intellectual one nor the estimative one. Rather, we acquire these judgments from the days of our childhood through constant repetition (*takrīr*).[94] Al-Ghazālī repeats much of what Avicenna says about these kinds judgments in his *Pointers and Reminders* and in the *Salvation* — where they are called *dhāʾiʿāt* — including the thought experiment which shall prove that these conventions are not part of the *fiṭra*. Like Avicenna, al-Ghazālī lets his readers imagine a human without education, religious upbringing, or intellectual environment, yet with sense perception, and he concludes that in such a situation one would be able to doubt the truth of such statements as "truthfulness is good" and "lying is bad." Since we can doubt them, these judgments do not come from the initial, originally disposed intellect (*al-ʿaql al-awwalī al-fiṭrī*).[95]

These social conventions cannot be used in demonstrative arguments unless their truth is established by another argument, al-Ghazālī clarifies. In fact, using social conventions as premises is the hallmark of arguments used by dialectical scholars (*aqyisat al-jadaliyyīn*). Many a dialectic argument among the *mutakallimūn* and the jurists, says al-Ghazālī, is based on premises like these. While there may be circumstances that one has to rely on them in a practical discipline such as jurisprudence (*fiqh*), these premises should not be used in other sciences: "Commonly accepted judgments (*al-mashhūrāt*) are proper as probable judgments of jurisprudence (*fiqhiyyāt ẓanniyya*) but not as any other judgments."[96]

All this sufficiently clarifies, I think, al-Ghazālī's usage of the word *fiṭra* in his autobiography and his *Revival of the Religious Sciences*. First of all, al-Ghazālī sometimes uses the word *fiṭra* in the sense of "individual talent," just like al-Fārābī and

[92] al-Ghazālī, *Miḥakk al-naẓar*, 53.13–19; *al-Mustaṣfā*, 1:146.9–12.
[93] al-Ghazālī, *Miḥakk al-naẓar*, 48.13–14; *al-Mustaṣfā*, 1:139.9–10.
[94] al-Ghazālī, *Miḥakk al-naẓar*, 55.16–56.5; *al-Mustaṣfā*, 1:150.2–151.6.
[95] al-Ghazālī, *Miḥakk al-naẓar*, 57.5–16; *al-Mustaṣfā*, 1:152.13–153.11.
[96] al-Ghazālī, *Miḥakk al-naẓar*, 58.5; slightly different in *al-Mustaṣfā*, 154.6–7.

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Bahmanyār, for instance, have used it.[97] But when in his autobiography al-Ghazālī brings up the *fiṭra* against the religious upbringing of Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians — including his own Muslim upbringing — he has a more technical meaning in mind. He draws on the distinction between the judgments of *fiṭra* and the social conventions.[98] What stands in opposition to those conventions is not Islam but merely the first intelligibles and the true judgments of estimation, which are both identified as parts of the *fiṭra*. Moral judgments are not part of the *fiṭra*. "The boy is through his substance (*bi-jawharihi*) created to be receptive to both, good and evil, and it is his parents who make him lean towards the one or the other."[99] The judgments of the *wahm* are initiated by sense perception and may then, when approved by the intellect, become first intelligibles. Once this process unfolds without being disturbed by social conventions or social pressures, it assures that the individual acquires true judgments. These then become the premises with which demonstrative reasoning and scientific knowledge begins. This latter "theoretical knowledge" (*ʿulūm naẓariyya*) does, of course, require additional sources — or "causes" as al-Ghazālī says — chief among them the judgments of experimentation (*tajribiyyāt*). Therefore, the true judgments of the *fiṭra* enable the individual to develop accurate knowledge about the world. For al-Ghazālī as well as Avicenna such knowledge remains descriptive and once the human reaches into the field of moral judgments he or she has left the ground of truth that the judgments of the *fiṭra* help to build. This is where Islam comes in, because according to al-Ghazālī true moral judgments can only come from revelation.[100] One of the reasons why Avicenna's concept of *fiṭra* was so attractive to al-Ghazālī is the implication that turning away from one's upbringing and toward the *fiṭra* leads to truth in understanding God and His creation as well as the realization that one's opinions about right or wrong are mere social conventions. To the Avicennan teaching that valid moral judgments do not come from one's parents or teachers the Ashʿarite al-Ghazālī adds that they must be derived from the Qur'an. Relying on one's *fiṭra* creates room for what is true Islam.

There seems to be at least one other point where al-Ghazālī goes beyond the teachings of Avicenna. Al-Ghazālī seems to have believed that the judgments of the *fiṭra* contain knowledge of God's existence. In the 21st book of the *Revival of the Religious Sciences* al-Ghazālī writes within a brief commentary on Q 30:30: "Every human is created with the *fiṭra* toward belief in God, exalted, and also toward knowing the things as they really are."[101] Neither here now anywhere else, as far as I can see, can we find a

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[97] Al-Ghazālī does so at the beginning of the passage that is quoted first in this paper from *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl*, 10.22 (see note 2) or in the text note 19.

[98] The social conventions may be *mashhūrat*, *maqbūlāt*, or other judgments.

[99] al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, 3:95.2–3 (8:1478.1–2).

[100] George F. Hourani, *Reason and Revelation in Islamic Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 135–165.

[101] *kull ādamī fuṭira ʿalā l-īmān bi-Llāh (. . .)*; al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, 1:120.9–10 (1:148.8). See also the already quoted (note 17) passage in the 21st book of the *Iḥyāʾ*, 3:19.10–15 (8:1369.9–14), that

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justification or a proper explanation of this particular teaching. We have to fill in the blanks ourselves: "Belief in God," here means monotheism and not the religion of Islam.[102] While this does not seem to come from Avicenna, there is still a way to explain such an initial knowledge of God in Avicennan terms. Al-Ghazālī could mean that together with each sense perception, the faculty of estimation perceives a notion or an attribute such as "this thing has a single cause."[103] Subsequently the faculty of estimation concludes in a universal way: "All things have a single cause." This judgment of estimation is then checked by the intellect and found to be true, thus providing knowledge of the one creator God to all humans, regardless of their education or upbringing.

While al-Ghazālī wrote very little about this kind of original knowledge, Ibn Taymiyya declared explicitly that knowledge of God's existence is part of the *fiṭra*.[104] When some rationalist scholars feel the need or desire to prove God's existence through arguments, Ibn Taymiyya said, it only shows a corrupted *fiṭra* that has lost its sound condition. What Ibn Taymiyya expresses here in clear terms may have already been anticipated by al-Ghazālī and become a view that was widespread among post-Ghazalian scholars of Islam.[105] This understanding may well have generated in the context of Q 30:30, where being a *ḥanīf*, a pre-Islamic monotheist such as Abraham, is closely connected to the *fiṭra*.[106]

It seems clear to me that Avicenna's teachings about *fitra* are central for the whole Muslim tradition and that they also form the underlying foundation for such important *fiṭra* theories as that of Ibn Taymiyya. Wael B. Hallaq had highlighted that for Ibn

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begins by saying that through the *fiṭra* each soul (*qalb*) is enabled to know the true essences of things and ends with the statement that the human souls have an original (*fī l-aṣl*) capacity "to carry trust in God, exalted, and that trust is the knowledge and the *tawḥīd*." (*ḥaml amānat Allāh taʿālā wa-tilka l-amāna hiya l-maʿrifa wa-l-tawḥīd*).

[102] In his commentary on the *Iḥyā ʿulūm al-dīn*, al-Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī (d. 1205/1791) says that by "belief" al-Ghazālī means here "the necessary knowledge of God" (*maʿrifat Allāh al-ḍarūriyya*). See *Itḥāf al-sāda al-muttaqīn bi-sharḥ Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, 10 vols. (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Maymaniyya, 1311 [1894]), 1:463.31–32.

[103] In his commentary, al-Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī (same reference as in the previous note) explains it slightly differently: Every individual has knowledge that he or she is caused (*mafʿūl*) and has a maker (*fāʿil*). This knowledge is not acquired (*muktasaba*).

[104] Wael B. Hallaq, "Ibn Taymiyya on the Existence of God," *Acta Orientalia* 52 (1991): 49–69, esp. 49, 54–56.

[105] Note that al-Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī in his monumental dictionary of the Arabic language *Tāj al-ʿarūs min jawāhir al-qāmūs* (ed. ʿA. A. Farrāj, 40 vols. [Kuwait: Wizārat al-Irshād wa-l-Anbāʾ, 1965–2001], 13:329) defines *fiṭra* as, "the knowledge of God with which God created humans." (*mā faṭara Llāh ʿalayhi al-khalq min al-maʿrifa bihi*). Lane in his *Arabic-English Lexicon,* 6:2416, translates this as: "The faculty of knowing God, with which He has created mankind." Al-Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī was, of course, also an expert in Ghazali-studies, see footnotes 102 and 103.

[106] Q 6:75–79 describe Abraham's conversion from polytheism to monotheism and are often referred to by al-Ghazālī. He understood Abraham's insight into monotheism as the result of a self-induced rational process of developing knowledge about God.

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Taymiyya, for instance, the existence of God is known through the *fiṭra* and also through sense perception. Hallaq criticized this concept as circular.[107] If, however, the *fiṭra* includes the judgments of the faculty of estimation (*wahm*), and the latter are perceived *together with* sense perceptions, then Ibn Taymiyya's teachings are not circular but represent an Avicennan understanding of *fiṭra*. It is important to keep in mind that for all these authors *fiṭra* does not mean *a priori* knowledge. It rather means knowledge that any human can arrive at, no matter how he or she grows up or how he or she lives. While this does include what early modern philosophers in the West have called *a priori* knowledge, it is not limited to that.

[107] Hallaq, "Ibn Taymiyya on the Existence of God," 65–66.

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